

1 Corinthians 1:18-25 PM

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[0 : 0 0] Hello, everybody. It's really nice to see you all. If you don't know me, my name is Aaron. I'm the minister that looks after this service. Come and say hi to me afterwards. I would love to just meet you.

We have recently started a series. We're looking at 1 Corinthians. And so tonight we're looking at the reading that Jordan did second, which is 1 Corinthians 1, 18 to 25.

It's probably going to be helpful if you had a Bible open or an app open. I want you to know that the passage tonight contains a bit of a bombshell, bombshell, and we'll get there eventually.

But first, let me start with a question. Why is it that most people are not Christians? Why isn't everyone I know a Christian?

I mean, Jesus is great. Right? Jesus is really great. He said amazing things.

[1 : 1 0] He did miracles. Why doesn't everybody just, like, get on board with it? Because, Paul says, at the heart of our faith is the cross.

And in verse 18, he really just sort of quite plainly and bluntly acknowledges that for most people, the message of the cross sounds stupid. Like, it's crazy.

Verse 18, he says very clearly, the word of the cross is folly. The message of the cross is that God became a human and died for our sins.

And that sounds a bit crazy for a lot of people. I play Wordle every morning. If you don't know what Wordle is, it's an online word guessing game.

You get six attempts to guess a word. I have a friend, and every morning we send each other our Wordle scores. He wins about 70 to 80% of the time.

[2 : 1 8] And that makes me sad. There you go. That is a not very interesting story. Right? It's not very interesting.

But if you add context, it adds a lot more flavor to it. So here's the context. My friend, who mostly wins Wordle, is German.

And we play English Wordle. Now, doesn't that add some flavor to the story? I am losing most days of the week to a person whose first language is not English.

Are you feeling me now? Are you feeling me now? Okay. You understand my sadness. Context is helpful. Let me add some context to this Paul, to this letter that Paul wrote.

Okay? So Corinthian was this large, multi-ethnic, multi-faith church. They valued power and wisdom and wealth. And they wanted to achieve great things in life.

[3 : 2 1] They wanted to be applauded for it. And the church in Corinth was breathing this Corinthian air, which is why we find out later their church was very showy. They wanted spectacular, flashy church services.

And as we work through the book, you'll see it seems that this church sort of dialed down, turned down the message of the cross and its messages to present a more sort of triumphalist version of the faith.

Something a bit more rah-rah. Because the cross is a bit of a downer. Back in the days, the crucifixion, it wasn't even something that people talked about.

It was a vulgar thing to bring up in polite company. And this church in Corinth, it was more Corinthian than Christian. And they absorbed all these values around them, like we do.

And they'd pushed the cross to the sidelines. And it is a great temptation in churches. I'm like, this is my job. This is our profession. And we know a lot of other working churchy types.

[4 : 29] And there is a great temptation to sort of configure your church around just these amazing preachers. And get this incredible band in. And get these incredible visiting speakers in. And just have a constant stream of really relevant topics to kind of like meet the people where they're at.

I mean, Paul tackles this head on. And he says to them, look, I know, I know. He says, I know most people don't want to hear about the cross because it sounds a bit crazy.

And when you tell him, I think it's kind of ludicrous. But he says, for us, this is how God saves us. It's the cross. It's the cross. It's the cross. Verse 18.

For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing. But to us who are being saved, it's the power of God. So the cross that is so humiliating and so full of sadness and so uninspiring, God uses that to save us.

So that answers our first question. Why isn't everyone a Christian? Well, a big part of the answer is it's the cross. In that context, in our context, it just looks weak.

[5 : 38] The cross says you need saving. The idea that you need to be saved by someone who's not you is offensive. It's just completely out of step with culture. The idea that this executed criminal killed on a rubbish heap on the outskirts of Jerusalem died to save you, that guy's the king of the universe.

I mean, are you out of your mind? The cross sounds like folly. And I'm so grateful for Paul's honesty here. I know. It sounds just folly, doesn't it?

Next question. Couldn't God have come up? Well, this is a great question, Jordan. Couldn't God, you can listen, couldn't God have come up with a way of saving us that was a bit more impressive?

Right? Something more marketable, something that really connects with culture, something more attractive, that didn't have, like, this horrible death in the middle of it?

Remember the context, right? Corinth was about the spectacular, about applause, and the cross was about humiliation and weakness. Couldn't have God come up with something just a bit stronger looking?

[6 : 56] I do a few weddings. I fish at weddings, you know, and I say to the couple, if you invite me to the reception, and you don't know where to seek me, put me on the table with the people who aren't Christians.

So, like, a cousin you might have, or some work colleagues you might have who are not Christians. Put me at that table. I'd love to chat to them. So, it happened at the last wedding I did a little while ago.

The gentleman I sat beside was very clever. He was not a Christian. We started talking about faith. So, I'm doing my pitch at the table. I'm doing my pitch, right? And I'm telling him about Christianity.

And I feel like I've got some gravitas. Because I did this, I did the whole ceremony, right? And I'd say some stuff. And he'd say, yeah, but what about this issue? And what about that?

And what about this point of Christianity? And what about that? What about that? What about that? And the objections just kept coming and coming and coming. And it was unrelenting. And I kept just having to say, yeah, look.

[7 : 58] Yeah, listen. I don't, yeah, no, I know, I know. Yep, you're right. I don't know why that happens. And I don't understand why God, why it's this way. And I don't have an answer.

And he kept saying to me, it's not good enough. Your answers are not good enough. It was like a month ago. Did I tell you about this guy?

Yeah, you did. Anyway, so this chap, he wrote me a really lovely email the next day, which was really nice. But at that reception, as I replayed over my head, I wish I'd have had some knockdown argument for faith.

Just some amazing line I could just deliver. Some incredible line of reasoning. And I'd say it and then be this hushed silence.

And everyone around the table would go, ooh, can't argue with that. All right. Folks, we have the cross. We have the message of the cross, which is going to sound foolish to many.

[9 : 04] Actually, that word foolish, it comes up later in the passage. It's going to sound foolish to people. It's a Greek word. Because the New Testament was written in Greek. And that Greek word foolish is moros, which we get the word moron from.

So if you're a Christian and your family, that's what your family thinks about you, because you're the only Christian in your family. Maybe your neighbors think that.

Maybe your friends think that. Maybe you're a young person and you're at university. And your professors have made you feel that about yourself. Folks, that is nothing new.

It's nothing new. Okay, let's have a look at verse 21 for a moment. I'm going to come back to that second question. Let's look at verse 21 for a moment. Let's consider what it's telling us. Verse 21. In the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom.

Isn't this wild? In the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom. God says, the world will not know me through worldly wisdom. Can I have this idea of what success looked like?

[10 : 12] And it did not look like a religion based on the cross. Now, remember my question. Surely God could have come up with some way of saving that looked more impressive, that was more marketable, that was more sort of success-y, more rah-rah.

And here's the bombshell. It is no accident that the message of the cross sounds crazy to us. It's no accident. God designed our salvation to purposely appear foolish. And God knew that salvation would appear foolish to many.

So why did he do it that way? Well, the answer is in verse 19. It's a quote from Isaiah. I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.

I will destroy the wisdom of the wise. That is what God wants to do. So stay with me here. God wants to undermine our pride, our wisdom.

He wants to take an axe to it. So he makes himself unknowable through wisdom. Verse 21.

[11 : 18] For since in the wisdom of God the world did not know God through wisdom. God made it so that we couldn't think our way into a friendship with him.

We couldn't philosophize our way into a friendship with him. Imagine if we could. What would that religion look like? What would that faith look like?

It would be the faith of the elite. It would be the faith of the proud. And we know how that thinking would go. It would be a woman, pretty good person. Pretty great guy, pretty great girl.

Certainly good enough for God. See, God has to undermine that. He has to subvert that story we tell ourselves. And that's what the cross does. Because the message of the cross is we are so broken.

We are so lost. That Christ had to die to save us. We don't want to believe it. But in order to be saved, we have to let go of our pride.

[12 : 24] And God must break it down. So he intentionally brings about salvation in a way that crashes. That smashes into our pride. Through a salvation that looks like weakness and humility.

Take verse 20 here. Where is the one who was wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?

It was God's intention that it looks foolish. In the Corinthian days, the most impressive folks were these traveling philosophers. And they debated publicly. And they gained followers. And they got applause.

And they got money. They were called sophists. From the Greek word meaning wisdom. They were like the superstar influencer types. They're very, very popular. And Paul says none of them can lead you to God.

Remember the context. Just again, the Corinthians wants it to be as impressive as these kind of TED talking philosophers. Right? They wanted a faith that looked like that.

[13 : 29] These really impressive orators. And Paul says stop it. Like stop it. We have the cross. This is how we are saved. Preach that.

And Paul gives us some very specific examples of what impressive looks like to people. He gives them as examples of what these folks wanted salvation to look like.

Verse 22. The Jews demand science and the Greeks seek wisdom. But we preach Christ crucified. A stumbling block to the Jews and folly to the Greeks.

So what's going on here? See the Jews and Greeks, they rejected the message of the cross because it just didn't fit their categories. See the Jews, they wanted something super spiritual.

They wanted super spiritual stuff to happen. And the Greeks, they wanted salvation to look like this sophisticated philosophy. And again, it's kind of like the stumbling blocks for sort of, you know, folks just like us.

[14 : 31] We want a kind of a spirituality that either can go in a couple of different directions. Either go in a real sort of supernatural sort of thing. Or some rigid sort of worldview that we can sort of latch onto that we feel explains everything.

And what does Paul say? What does Paul say to preach? What does Paul say to put at the center? It's the cross. It doesn't look impressive. It doesn't sound wise. But it saves. Unlike these other things.

And it saves because one of the things it does is it overturns our pride. It overturns our ideas of what power looks like. Let me close up here.

You see how Paul summarizes his ideas in verse 25 here? It's brilliant. For the foolishness of God. God on a bad day. Like, which isn't a thing that can happen. But the foolishness of God is wiser than men.

And when it says men, it means men and women. The foolishness of God is wiser than men. And the weakness of God is stronger than men. It's saying the chasm between God's wisdom and us, the chasm is so big and it's so wide that God's wisdom sounds just foolish to us.

[15 : 51] This executed criminal killed on a rubber sheep on the outskirts of Jerusalem is the king of the universe. And he made a way for us to have friendship with God through the cross. This is God's wisdom.

It's the story of the world. Is it the story you are living into? Because I know there's options out there. There's very compelling options out there.

There's attractive options out there. I'll just throw a couple out before I finish. Humanism. It's a very attractive idea. It's the idea that we're pure physicality. We're just chemical impulses. It's a great story.

It's a compelling one because you can kind of do what you want. All these therapeutic moral deism. Have you heard of this? Therapeutic moral deism.

There's a great book written on it a few years ago. It says this is basically the prevailing spirituality of North America. It masquerades as Christianity. It kind of looks like Christianity.

[16 : 49] But it's the idea that God exists just for you. And he just wants to hook you up with nice things. And he wants to solve your problems. And God says, look, I'm just here to make you happy. And you can sort of pick and choose what you believe in the Bible.

But it's all gravy. There's no substance. It makes no real demands of you. But our story is the cross. At the center of our story is the cross.

It sounds foolish. No human would make this religion up. And it breaks down our pride. And it demands so much more of us. And it is a source of astonishing joy.

It's God's story. It's the story we are in. And it saves. Amen.